

**Rondo Forest Reserve, Tanzania: an ornithological note including new records of the East Coast Akalat *Sheppardia gunningi*, the Spotted Ground Thrush *Turdus fischeri*, and the Rondo Green Barbet *Stactolaema olivacea woodwardi***

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The Rondo Forest Reserve is a semi-deciduous coastal forest situated at 10°10S, 39°15E in southern Tanzania, 77 km by road from the coastal town of Lindi. The forest is heterogeneous, with substantial numbers of large canopy trees, such as *Chlorophora excelsior* and *Ficus* sp. still present. Although the native flora is now threatened by extensive, illegal burning, as well as legal forestry practices, the indigenous forest still covers an area of approximately 18 km<sup>2</sup>, making it probably the third largest remaining Tanzanian coastal forest. Despite the well recognized ornithological importance of coastal forests (e.g. Collar & Stuart 1988), and some early interest in the birds of the area, the Rondo Plateau has been virtually ignored by ornithologists. We visited the forest from 16 October to 3 December 1988 as part of a general coastal forest survey sponsored and supported by the Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania. Further information concerning the fauna, flora and conservation status of the forest is in the expedition report (available from the authors).

Using the scheme described in Collar & Stuart (1988) to assess the importance of forests for threatened African birds, our data suggest that Rondo ranks as joint 44th out of 75 forests, along with the forests of southeastern Kenya, including the Shimba Hills. This paper is intended as a brief introduction to the avifauna of the area, in the hope that further interest may be cultivated. Most of the birds observed are simply listed, although a few which we consider to be of special interest are described with additional notes. One member of the original team (AB) returned to the forest in February 1989 with two ornithologists (Kaj Halberg and Jans Bagger) from the Danish International Council for Bird Preservation. A total of 106 species was recorded between October and December, and a further 15 identified in February.

### Species of special interest

#### **Southern Banded Snake Eagle *Circaetus fasciolatus***

One bird was seen flying over the forest on 25 and 26 November.

#### **Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo *Cercococcyx montanus***

One individual was seen in the *miombo* woodland surrounding the forest, and the bird was heard calling on a number of occasions. This species is usually considered to prefer montane habitats, and may possibly be a seasonal visitor to the coast.

#### **Green Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus simplex***

Fry, Keith & Urban (1988) mention an "apparent gap in S Tanzania and N Mozambique" in the distribution of this species. However, we caught and observed this tinkerbird species on a number of occasions.

**Rondo Green Barbet *Stactolaema olivacea woodwardi***

This subspecies of the Green Barbet is known only from the Rondo Plateau. Five individuals were caught during the expedition; they showed no evidence of breeding. Birds were frequently heard and occasionally seen in the forest canopy, and a roosting hole was discovered approximately six meters high in the trunk of a large forest tree, which was regularly used by up to eight individuals simultaneously. All birds inspected showed a conspicuous patch of yellow on the head behind the eye, which appears to be more extensive than that shown for the Ngoye forest race in Fry, Keith & Urban (1988).

**African Pitta *Pitta angolensis***

Seven birds were netted, the first being caught on 19 November. All were in breeding condition.

**Red-capped Robin Chat *Cossypha natalensis***

No robin chats were recorded before 4 November, suggesting that this species is absent from the plateau before the rainy season.

**East Coast Akalat *Sheppardia gunningi***

This species has previously been recorded from only one site in Tanzania, the Pugu Hills, 20 km west of Dar es Salaam (Howell 1981), and has an extremely local distribution elsewhere in East Africa (Collar & Stuart 1985). It was exciting, therefore, to find that the akalat was common in the forest reserve; in fact, it was the most frequently caught species, with 129 individuals ringed (constituting 22 per cent of the total). We netted our first bird showing evidence of breeding on 13 November; however, the majority of individuals did not begin to develop brood patches until late November. Many juvenile birds were seen in February. One individual was caught at both the camps used, which, since the sites were approximately 6 km apart, demonstrates considerable potential for intra-forest movement in a species thought to be largely sedentary (N. Baker, pers. comm.). Given that the estimated extent of indigenous forest on the Rondo plateau is substantially more than that at Pugu (18 km<sup>2</sup> compared to 10 km<sup>2</sup>), it seems that Rondo represents the most important breeding site for this species yet recorded in Tanzania.

**Spotted Ground Thrush *Turdus fischeri***

Six individuals were caught, the first one netted on 5 November. All birds caught showed some development of a brood patch, becoming progressively more extensive in birds netted later that month. Previously, *T. fischeri* has been recorded only as a non-breeding visitor to coastal forest in Kenya, and sites in northern Mozambique have been proposed as the most likely nesting areas (Collar & Stuart 1985). It therefore seems very probable that the thrush is breeding on the plateau, making Rondo the first known breeding site for the nominate subspecies.

**Plain-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes reichenowi***

Seventeen individuals were caught during the study, and this species was frequently observed foraging in the lower canopy and shrub layers of the forest. It therefore seems to be relatively common in Rondo.

**Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes neglectus***

This species was observed on a number of occasions, feeding on flowering shrubs and trees of the canopy and in forest clearings. On 15 and 20 November a pair was observed nest building.

**Other species recorded**

The following species were recorded either in the forest (a), in the *miombo* woodland (b), flying over the plateau (c) or in Rondo village (d). The frequency of observation is indicated on a scale from 1 to 4, 1 denoting a species recorded only once, 4 indicating regular observations:

*Circus aeruginosus* Marsh Harrier c1; *Circaetus gallicus* Short-toed Snake Eagle c1; *Terathopius ecaudatus* Bateleur c1; *Accipiter tachiro* African Goshawk a4; *Aquila wahlbergi* Wahlberg's Eagle b2; *Buteo buteo* Common Buzzard c1; *Stephanoaetus coronatus* Crowned Eagle a2; *Pernis apivorus* Honey Buzzard c1; *Falco subbuteo* Hobby c1; *Guttera pucherani* Kenya Crested Guineafowl a4; *Aplopelia larvata* Lemon Dove a2; *Turtur chalcospilos* Emerald-spotted Wood Dove a3; *T. tympanistria* Tambourine Dove a3; *Treron australis* Green Pigeon a2; *Poicephalus robustus* Brown-necked Parrot a3; *Tauraco livingstonii* Livingstone's Turaco a3; *Chrysococcyx cupreus* Emerald Cuckoo b2; *C. klaas* Klaas' Cuckoo b1; *Cuculus poliocephalus* Lesser Cuckoo b1; *C. solitarius* Red-chested Cuckoo a3; *Ceuthmochares aereus* Yellowbill a3; *Ciccaba woodfordii* African Wood Owl a3; *Caprimulgus pectoralis* Fiery-necked Nightjar a2; *Apus apus* Eurasian Swift c3; *A. caffer* White-rumped Swift c3; *Cypsiurus parvus* Palm Swift c2; *Telecanthura ussheri* Mottle-throated Spinetail c2; *Apaloderma narina* Narina's Trogon a3; *Ispidina picta* Pygmy Kingfisher a3; *Merops apiaster* Eurasian Bee-eater b2; *M. hirundineus* Swallow-tailed Bee-eater b2; *M. pusillus* Little Bee-eater b2; *Eurystomus glaucurus* Broad-billed Roller b2; *Phoeniculus purpureus* Green Wood Hoopoe b3; *Bycanistes bucinator* Trumpeter Hornbill a2; *Tockus alboterminatus* Crowned Hornbill a4; *Buccanodon olivaceum* Green Barbet a4; *Pogoniulus bilineatus* Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird a3; *Indicator minor* Lesser Honeyguide a2; *I. variiegatus* Scaly-throated Honeyguide a2; *Campethera cailliautii* Little Spotted Woodpecker a3.

*Smithornis capensis* African Broadbill a3; *Delichon urbica* House Martin c2; *Hirundo abyssinica* Striped Swallow d2; *H. griseopyga* Grey-rumped Swallow b1; *H. rustica* Eurasian Swallow c2; *H. senegalensis* Mosque Swallow c2; *Psalidoprocne pristoptera* Black Roughwing b4; *Riparia paludicola* African Sand Martin c2; *Dicrurus ludwigii* Square-tailed Drongo a4; *Oriolus auratus* African Golden Oriole a3; *O. larvatus* Black-headed Oriole b3; *O. oriolus* Golden Oriole b3; *Corvus albicollis* White-necked Raven d1; *Parus albinervis* White-bellied Tit b1; *Campephaga flava* Black Cuckoo-shrike b1; *Andropadus virens* Little Greenbul a3; *Chlorocichla flaviventris* Yellow-Bellied Greenbul a3; *Nicator chloris* Nicator a4; *Phyllastrephus debilis* Tiny Greenbul a4; *P. fischeri* Fischer's Greenbul a3; *P. flavostriatus* Yellow-streaked Greenbul a4; *Pycnonotus barbatus* Common Bulbul b4; *Cercotrichas quadrivirgata* Eastern Bearded Scrub Robin a4; *Neocossyphus rufus* Red-tailed Ant Thrush a3; *Apalis melanocephala* Black-headed Apalis a3; *A. flavida* Yellow-breasted Apalis b1; *Camaroptera brachyura* Grey-backed Camaroptera a4; *Phylloscopus trochilus* Willow Warbler b1; *Bradornis pallidus* Pale Flycatcher b1; *Batis capensis* Forest Batis a4; *Bias musicus* Black and White Flycatcher b1; *Platysteira peltata* Black-throated Wattle-eye a2; *Erythrocercus holochlorus* Little Yellow Flycatcher a1; *E. livingstonii* Livingstone's Flycatcher a2; *Terpsiphone viridis* Paradise Flycatcher a1; *Trochocercus cyanomelas* Crested Flycatcher a3; *Dryoscopus cubla* Black-backed Puffback a4; *Laniarius ferrugineus* Tropical Boubou a4; *Malaconotus blanchoti* Grey-headed Bush Shrike a2; *M. quadricolor* Four-coloured Bush Shrike a3; *M. sulfureopectus* Sulphur-breasted Bush Shrike b1; *Tchagra*

*australis* Brown-headed Tchagra b2; *Prionops retzii* Retz's Helmet Shrike a3; *P. scopifrons* Chestnut-fronted Helmet Shrike a4; *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster* Violet-backed Starling a3; *Lamprotornis corruscus* Black-breasted Glossy Starling a3; *Anthreptes collaris* Collared Sunbird a3; *Nectarinia bifasciata* Little Purple-banded Sunbird b3; *N. olivacea* Olive Sunbird a4; *N. senegalensis* Scarlet-chested Sunbird b2; *Zosterops senegalensis* Yellow White-eye 2; *Euplectes ardens* Red-naped Widowbird b1; *Ploceus bicolor* Dark-backed Weaver a4; *Quelea quelea* Red-billed Quelea b1; *Passer griseus* Grey-headed Sparrow d2; *Hypargos niveoguttatus* Peters' Twinspot a3; *Mandingoa nitidula* Green-backed Twinspot a2; *Lagonosticta rubricata* Red-billed Firefinch b2; *Lonchura cucullata* Bronze Mannikin b4; *Serinus mozambicus* Yellow-fronted Canary b2.

### Conclusions

Given the relatively superficial nature of our investigations, the Rondo Plateau forest proved to be of very significant ornithological interest, with two species, the East Coast Akalat and Spotted Ground Thrush, treated as rare in the *Red Data Book* (Collar & Stuart 1985). Three others, the Southern Banded Snake Eagle, Plain-backed Sunbird and Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbird are considered near-threatened, and the endemic subspecies, Rondo Green Barbet, is treated as an incipient species at risk. We consider that more rigorously worded and enforced conservation policies should be a high priority for the area, since the present pace of forest destruction, especially through illegal burning, will seriously threaten the integrity of the habitat within a few years.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Neil and Liz Baker of the Wildlife Conservation Society of Tanzania for their support and guidance. We are also deeply indebted to Mr and Mrs T. Fison for their invaluable assistance, and to all the Forestry Department workers and others at Rondo who welcomed and assisted us. We are also indebted to the German Society for the Protection of Birds for providing financial assistance.

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